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## Connecting

January 13, 2022

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Colleagues,

Good Thursday morning on this Jan. 13, 2022,

"Oh No!"

That reaction by our colleague **Valerie Komor** to news of the death of **Mike Cochran** was echoed by many who knew and respected one of the reporting legends of The Associated Press.

Cochran – who opened the AP’s Fort Worth bureau in 1961 and served there until his retirement in 1999 - died late Tuesday night after a long battle with cancer. He was 85. A service will be held Saturday, Jan. 29, at 2:30 p.m. CST at Greenwood Funeral Homes in Fort Worth, Texas.

In his AP career, Cochran told the stories of Texas' larger-than life characters and ended up serving as

a pallbearer for Lee Harvey Oswald while covering the presidential assassin's funeral.

And he was a delight to know for all who were so privileged to work with him.

Today's Connecting leads with the story by Dallas AP journalist **Jamie Stengle** – blending in information from a host of AP people including **John Lumpkin**, former Dallas chief of bureau and AP vice president who has known Cochran since 1968, and **Diana Heidgerd**, retired Texas AP broadcast editor/Dallas news staffer.

Got a story or favorite memory to share of working with Mike? Please send it along to share in Connecting.

If you'd like to send condolences/remembrances to Mike's family, please email your message to Diana - [heidgerd@flash.net](mailto:heidgerd@flash.net) - or John - [jolumpk3@gmail.com](mailto:jolumpk3@gmail.com) - to be forwarded to his widow Sondra Cochran. Dallas AP's **Pam Collins** will also save hard copies of those messages for a memory book for the Cochran family.

Have a good day – be safe, stay healthy!

Paul



## One of a kind': Former AP reporter Mike Cochran dies at 85



**FILE - Mike Cochran poses for a photo on Nov. 15, 2013, at his home in Haltom City, Texas. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez, File)**

**By JAMIE STENGLE**

DALLAS (AP) — Mike Cochran, who during a nearly 40-year career with The Associated Press told the stories of Texas' larger-than-life characters with his rich and detailed writing, and who ended up serving as a pallbearer for Lee Harvey Oswald while covering the presidential assassin's funeral, has died. He was 85.

Cochran died late Tuesday night after a long battle with cancer, said longtime friend and former AP executive John O. Lumpkin.

"He made journalism a calling and, more often than not, fun," said Lumpkin, the AP's former vice president for newspaper markets and a former Dallas chief of bureau.

Lumpkin said Cochran was "no one-trick pony," noting he covered everything from sports to politics to natural disasters. "One of a kind, for sure. A legend, no question," Lumpkin said.

As part of the AP's coverage the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas in 1963, Cochran wrote a first-person account of how he came to be a pallbearer for Oswald. With no mourners present aside from a few of Oswald's family members, the task of carrying his coffin fell to the reporters covering the funeral.



**FILE - In this Nov. 25 ,1963, file photo, newsmen, including Mike Cochran, second pallbearer from left, covering the funeral of accused presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, carry the casket to the grave site at Rose Hill Cemetery in Fort Worth, Texas, after pallbearers could not be found. (AP Photo/File, courtesy AP Corporate Archives)**

“I was among the first they asked, my reply not just ‘No!’ but ‘Hell no!’” he wrote in the 2013 story. “Then Preston McGraw of United Press International stepped forward and volunteered, and with my top competition for scoops accepting the duty, I realized my error and joined McGraw and other reporters.”

Cochran, who had covered Kennedy’s visit to Fort Worth just before Kennedy was killed in Dallas, wrote that his reporting on the assassination continued for years as he interviewed Oswald’s widow and mother, investigated conspiracy theories and wrote anniversary stories.

On one anniversary, he recalled approaching Oswald’s widow, Marina, at her house. She told him she was “no longer news” but he mentioned his role as a pallbearer and she invited him in. Several hours later, they were “still talking and smoking,” he wrote.

“He was so likable and he had that quality that a good reporter has, where he was not intimidating at all,” said Barry Bedlan, AP’s director of text and new markets products. “In fact, he brought down your guard, he brought down everyone’s guard with his own kind of sense of humor and his warm presence that he could get anyone to tell him about anything,”

Over the years, his subjects included Cullen Davis, an oil tycoon acquitted at trial after being accused in a shooting at his mansion that killed his 12-year-old stepdaughter



and his estranged wife's boyfriend.

Cochran, known for his descriptive writing, began his 1996 story marking the 20th anniversary of the killings at the Davis mansion with this line: "The murderous 'man in black' appeared at the remote Cullen Davis mansion that steamy summer night wearing a woman's black wig and carrying a .38 revolver."

He covered flamboyant swindler Billie Sol Estes throughout the 1970s and 1980s, writing about how Estes made millions of dollars in phony fertilizer tanks. Cochran noted in the AP obituary for Estes in 2013, "how many city slickers from New York or Chicago can make a fortune selling phantom cow manure?"

"Billie Sol was a character's character," Cochran told The AP. "I spent literally years chasing him in and out of prison and around the state as he pulled off all kinds of memorable shenanigans."

Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, Cochran grew up in the West Texas town of Stamford and graduated from what is now the University of North Texas in Denton.

He began his career at newspapers in Denton and Abilene before joining the AP in 1960 in Dallas and opening the AP's Fort Worth bureau the next year. He retired from AP in 1999 and then went on to work for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram for five more years.

He also wrote several books, including "Texas vs. Davis," about the murder case against Davis, and "Claytie," which details the life of Clayton Williams, a colorful Texas oilman and philanthropist whose 1990 run for governor was derailed after joking about rape and acknowledging he went a year without paying income taxes.

Cochran (pictured at right in 1962) was inducted into the Texas Newspaper Foundation Hall of Fame in 2018. He won numerous awards over his career, including Star Reporter of the Year from the Headliners Foundation, the top individual award given annually to a Texas journalist.



"He won a trunk load of journalism awards but he cared more about his readers, his sources and his friends," Lumpkin said.

He's survived by his wife Sondra, son John Shannon Cochran, daughter Kendyl Arnold, four grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

His funeral will be held Jan. 29 in Fort Worth.

Click [here](#) for link to this story.

Click [here](#) for Fort Worth Star-Telegram story.

Click [here](#) for Cochran's 2013 story on being an Oswald pallbearer. (Courtesy AP Corporate Archives)

## Remembering Mike Cochran

**Diana Heidgerd (Email)** - Getting to see my buddy Mike Cochran several months ago at the AP Connecting Regional Reunion in Texas was pure joy. I was thrilled when Mike's wife, Sondra, contacted me to say they'd be attending some of the activities, which ended up drawing about 60 people.

So it was with real sadness that, at Sondra's request, I emailed details of Mike's death to the dozens of folks who'd attended or expressed an interest in being part of last year's reunion, pulled off with pandemic safety measures in mind.

I'd known Mike since I transferred to Dallas from AP Miami in early 1985. I'm not going to reflect on those ensuing years, or better described as decades of his brilliant writing, but instead share how overjoyed everyone was to see Mike and his darling wife at the AP Connecting reunion held in mid-September in the Dallas area.



Dozens of journalism friends greeted Mike Cochran and his wife, Sondra, on Friday night, Sept. 17, 2021, at the AP Connecting reunion BBQ dinner in Trophy Club, Texas. Sondra and Mike are in the first row, third & fourth (from left). (Photo by David Woo)

Sondra on Wednesday asked me to tell everyone that Mike "really enjoyed" attending the reunion. She added: "He loved the AP and there was never a more dedicated employee than he. He was completely suited for being a journalist at the time he was."

I was drafted into helping plan last September's reunion, as the on-site person, by two AP pals – Mike Holmes of Omaha and Brent Kallestad of Tallahassee, Florida.

All three of us were thinking the same thing upon hearing that Mike Cochran, who had been in ill health, died Tuesday night at age 85. We were all so happy to have visited with him at the reunion.

"A lot of folks were thrilled to see him! That reunion, I believe will burn brightly forever in the minds of everyone who attended," according to Brent Kallestad.

Mike Holmes agreed. "This makes me even happier we pulled off the Dallas reunion. It was so good to see him again," Mike told me Wednesday night, via email.

So I'm offering a personal fond farewell to one of AP's best writers – Mike Cochran – and giving thanks that I got to see him one last time in September.

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**Mike Holmes (Email)** - In my 27 years with the AP in four states, I was lucky enough to work with many talented people. But no one could compare to Mike Cochran. Whether it was urgent breaking news or a Sunday feature, Mike was a poet on deadline. It was a pleasure to know him and an honor to work alongside him.

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**Kelley Shannon (Email)** - I'm remembering extraordinary journalist Mike Cochran, who passed away Tuesday night. Thank you, Mike, thank you. You, of course, have been a superb reporter and writer, covering Texas and its strange people and places like no one else. You have also been my mentor and friend. I say this with a tear in my eye as I mourn your passing. But I also say it with a smile when I remember your colorful life and career, your commitment to the truth and just how much fun we had!

Mike was encouraging and inspiring when I began to take an interest in journalism as a career as a teenager. I first met Mike when he covered the never-ending saga of the murder trials of multimillionaire Cullen Davis of Fort Worth. My dad was a prosecutor in the case, so I got to watch court hearings, meet the news reporters and, later, listen in on my father's interviews with Mike for Mike's book. When I was in college at the University of Texas, Mike was a guiding light for me and even took the time to come speak to our Society of Professional Journalists campus chapter, at my request. True to form, he wanted us to meet casually at Scholz Garten rather than in a classroom, and that was fine with us students. He entertained and intrigued us with journalism war stories and his funny quips as we leaned in and listened around a table filled with beer mugs.

Years later, after I was a reporter at a couple of newspapers, I was hired at the Associated Press in Dallas, with Mike as my champion. As I progressed through a 22-year AP career, working in Dallas, San Antonio and Austin and on big breaking stories around the state, Mike taught me along the way as I learned the right way to report on criminal trials (remember Dallas minister Walker Railey?) and golf tournaments (at

the Texas Open in San Antonio I learned from Mike how to write about sports personalities and key in on a pivotal moment or fact that defined the day's story).

Whether covering criminal courts or pro golf, Mike taught me how to do it with care, plus lots of laughter. Mostly, Mike taught me that it's possible to be an excellent reporter and a decent person at the same time. He knew how to listen to people, not show off. He knew that kindness, accuracy and ethics win you sources and scoops and trust. He didn't have to boast; his reporting and writing proved his deep talent. We were writers and reporters together, covering the Branch Davidian standoff in Waco and the ensuing trial in San Antonio and so many other wild stories that seemingly could only happen in Texas. What a thrill it was to work alongside my mentor. I'm forever grateful to Mike for showing me how it's done - and for being my friend.

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**Sylvia Wingfield (Email)** - Jamie Stengle's AP obituary says "One of a Kind," and Mike Cochran really was. Those words are from John Lumpkin, Mike's AP colleague, bureau chief, co-author and friend.

For many of us junior to him in the Texas AP, Mike was a legend who had covered every big story since the Kennedy assassin — and un-covered many more. He wrote books and great narrative news pieces. But he was also our everyday teammate, mentor and friend. And fellow journalists all over Texas felt the same way.

## Babies and deadlines

**Julio Cortez (Email)** – AP staff photographer, Baltimore: *As to the question, Wonder if others have stories to share about babies who arrived before deadline while they had planned to be working?...*

While I wasn't the one giving birth, my wife, Emily, started to labor for our second child. Our first child's labor was 39 hours, so we thought we had time. I was in my office in the basement, making digital prints and making sure all loose ends were taken care of before I went on paternity leave.

We had scheduled a home birth with our midwife, who lived 30 minutes away.

Before long, Emily was calling me because she said it was getting intense. We called midwife to head over. And then called her back again 15 minutes later to ask for guidance as I was about to catch our baby, Roman. She walked me through the procedure on speaker phone. And eventually she showed up. Her labor time was very short, about 90 minutes total. Scary, but magical.

For our third child, we went with a midwife that lived closer. She was on time, but she let me catch our baby, Benjamin, since I was a seasoned vet at these things by now. Haha.



# More about NFT

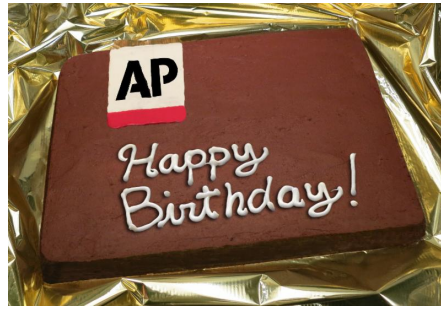
**Dwayne Desaulniers (Email)** - Blockchain technology includes a feature called a non-fungible token (NFT) that basically allows digital items to be tagged and tracked. In the past 10 months, AP and a number of other content creators have been testing the NFT technology. In AP's case, we are applying the technology to personal-use photo licenses. The test is whether this tracking function would give us the comfort to allow a personal-use photo license to be resold by the licensee. Amazingly, another NFT feature would work to automatically cut AP (as the photo owner) in on any resale of the license. Our work is to understand whether the license can be expanded this way because, if so, it opens up a new revenue stream. Copyright, however, continues to rest with the content creator and is not part of the expanded personal use rights.

## Donna Davidson gets Zoom surprise for her 30th AP anniversary



**Donna Davidson (Email)** – AP sales planner, Los Angeles, in a Facebook post: I was just surprised on a Zoom call for my 30th anniversary with Associated Press! Holy cow! I did not see that coming! What a wonderful surprise to see so many people I hadn't seen in years (except on Facebook!) and letting me know their appreciation for my work over the years. Memories abounded. I teared up a few times, especially when they mentioned (my son) Colin. The Los Angeles bureau was such a huge part of my life, and I always felt lucky to be there. It is such an honor to work for this place with so many lovely, dedicated, talented, warm people. Back to work!

## Connecting wishes Happy Birthday



Hilmi Toros

## Welcome to Connecting



Jesus Medina

## Stories of interest

### *Omicron wave prompts media to rethink which data to report* (AP)

By DAVID BAUDER

NEW YORK (AP) — For two years, coronavirus case counts and hospitalizations have been widely used barometers of the pandemic’s march across the world.

But the omicron wave is making a mess of the usual statistics, forcing news organizations to rethink the way they report such figures.

“It’s just a data disaster,” said Katherine Wu, staff writer who covers COVID-19 for The Atlantic magazine.

The number of case counts soared over the holidays, an expected development given the emergence of a variant more transmissible than its predecessors.

Yet these counts only reflect what is reported by health authorities. They do not include most people who test themselves at home, or are infected without even knowing about it. Holidays and weekends also lead to lags in reported cases.

If you could add all those numbers up — and you can't — case counts would likely be substantially higher.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Lou Boccardi, Myron Belkind.

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## ***TV News Rivals' Hiring Spree Heats Up As Priorities Shift*** (Hollywood Reporter)

By ALEX WEPRIN

The great cable news recalibration of 2022 is beginning.

With a number of high-profile on-air slots available, and CNN, MSNBC and Fox News all investing in streaming, the channels are beginning to rejigger their lineups as they plan for the future.

On Jan. 10, each channel made splashy hires, with MSNBC and CNN poaching high-profile outsiders to work on both their linear channels and streaming, while Fox News promoted a popular regular to headline one of its critical hours.

MSNBC revealed that Symone Sanders, who up until last month was the chief spokesperson for Vice President Kamala Harris, would host a weekend show and streaming program. A source familiar with the matter told The Hollywood Reporter that Sanders had been approached by multiple channels after she revealed her plans to depart, including CNN, but the hosting opportunity won out.

CNN, meanwhile, poached NPR's Audie Cornish to host a CNN+ streaming show and work as a correspondent on its linear channel. And Fox News promoted The Five co-host Jesse Watters as its permanent 7 pm host, after a year of rotating guest hosts.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Paul Albright.

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## ***Gannett to stop Saturday print editions at 136 newspapers nationwide*** (Boston Business Journal)

By Don Seiffert

The nation's largest newspaper chain is discontinuing Saturday print editions starting March 5 at more than half of its newspapers nationwide, saying it will instead offer "new, additional benefits" including expanded access to online editions.

Gannett Co. Inc. told staff in an email on Wednesday that it is “introducing a new Saturday experience in 136 of our markets which transitions from delivering the Saturday print edition to providing exclusive access to the full Saturday e-Edition.”

According to the company’s most recent annual filing, it operates 253 daily newspaper across the country.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Ralph Gage.

## The Final Word



## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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He said, "Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year. He is rich who owns the day, and no one owns the day who allows it to be invaded with fret and anxiety. Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities, no doubt crept in. Forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely, with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This new day is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays."



### Today in History - Jan. 13, 2022



## By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Jan. 13, the 13th day of 2022. There are 352 days left in the year.

### Today's Highlight in History:

On Jan. 13, 2021, President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House over the violent Jan. 6 siege of the Capitol, becoming the only president to be twice impeached; ten Republicans joined Democrats in voting to impeach Trump on a charge of "incitement of insurrection." (Trump would again be acquitted by the Senate in a vote after his term was over.)

### On this date:

In 1733, James Oglethorpe and some 120 English colonists arrived at Charleston, South Carolina, while en route to settle in present-day Georgia.

In 1794, President George Washington approved a measure adding two stars and two stripes to the American flag, following the admission of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union. (The number of stripes was later reduced to the original 13.)

In 1898, Emile Zola's famous defense of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, "J'accuse," (zhah-KOOZ'), was published in Paris.

In 1941, a new law went into effect granting Puerto Ricans U.S. birthright citizenship. Novelist and poet James Joyce died in Zurich, Switzerland, less than a month before his 59th birthday.

In 1982, an Air Florida 737 crashed into Washington, D.C.'s 14th Street Bridge and fell into the Potomac River while trying to take off during a snowstorm, killing a total of 78 people, including four motorists on the bridge; four passengers and a flight attendant survived.

In 1987, West German police arrested Mohammed Ali Hamadi, a suspect in the 1985 hijacking of a TWA jetliner and the killing of a U.S. Navy diver who was on board. (Although convicted and sentenced to life, Hamadi was paroled by Germany in December 2005 and returned home to Lebanon.)

In 1990, L. Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the nation's first elected Black governor as he took the oath of office in Richmond.

In 1992, Japan apologized for forcing tens of thousands of Korean women to serve as sex slaves for its soldiers during World War II, citing newly uncovered documents that showed the Japanese army had had a role in abducting the so-called "comfort women."

In 2000, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates stepped aside as chief executive and promoted company president Steve Ballmer to the position.

In 2001, an earthquake estimated by the U.S. Geological Survey at magnitude 7.7 struck El Salvador; more than 840 people were killed.

In 2011, a funeral was held in Tucson, Arizona, for 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green, the youngest victim of a mass shooting that also claimed five other lives and critically wounded Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

In 2020, at a royal family summit in eastern England, Queen Elizabeth II brokered a deal to secure the future of the monarchy; it would allow Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, to live part-time in Canada.

Ten years ago: The Italian luxury liner Costa Concordia ran aground off the Tuscan island of Giglio and flipped onto its side; 32 people were killed. (Capt. Francesco Schettino would be sentenced to 16 years in an Italian prison for abandoning ship and other crimes when he fled in a lifeboat and refused an order from the Italian Coast Guard to return to the listing ship.)

Five years ago: Federal prosecutors in Detroit announced that Takata Corp. had agreed to plead guilty to a single criminal charge and pay \$1 billion in fines and restitution for concealing a deadly defect in its air bag inflators. Lord Snowdon, the society photographer and filmmaker who married Britain's Princess Margaret and continued to mix in royal circles even after their divorce, died in London at age 86.

One year ago: Five-time Olympic swimming medalist Klete Keller was charged with participating in the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol after video emerged that appeared to show him among those storming the building. (Keller later pleaded guilty to a felony charge of obstruction of an official proceeding and agreed to cooperate with authorities.) The U.S. government carried out its first execution of a female inmate in nearly seven decades; a Kansas woman, Lisa Montgomery, who strangled an expectant mother in Missouri and cut the baby from her womb, received a lethal injection at a federal prison complex in Indiana. Siegfried Fischbacher, part of the entertainment duo Siegfried and Roy who performed in Las Vegas with their famed white tigers, died at 81.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Frances Sternhagen is 92. TV personality Nick Clooney is 88. Comedian Charlie Brill is 84. Actor Billy Gray is 84. Actor Richard Moll is 79. Rock musician Trevor Rabin is 68. R&B musician Fred White is 67. Rock musician James Lomenzo (Megadeth) is 63. Actor Kevin Anderson is 62. Actor Julia Louis-Dreyfus is 61. Rock singer Graham "Suggs" McPherson (Madness) is 61. Country singer Trace Adkins



is 60. Actor Penelope Ann Miller is 58. Actor Patrick Dempsey is 56. Actor Suzanne Cryer is 55. Actor Traci Bingham is 54. Actor Keith Coogan is 52. TV producer-writer Shonda Rhimes is 52. Actor Nicole Eggert is 50. Actor Ross McCall is 46. Actor Michael Pena is 46. Actor Orlando Bloom is 45. Meteorologist Ginger Zee (TV: "Good Morning America") is 41. Actor Ruth Wilson is 40. Actor Julian Morris is 39. Actor Beau Mirchoff is 33. Actor Liam Hemsworth is 32. NHL center Connor McDavid is 25.

## Got a story or photos to share?

Connecting is a daily newsletter published Monday through Friday that focuses on retired and former Associated Press employees, present-day employees, and news industry and journalism school colleagues. It began in 2013 and past issues can be found by clicking Connecting Archive in the masthead. Its author, Paul Stevens, retired from the AP in 2009 after a 36-year career.

Got a story to share? A favorite memory of your AP days? Don't keep them to yourself. Share with your colleagues by sending to Ye Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

Here are some suggestions:

- **Connecting "selfies"** - a word and photo self-profile of you and your career, and what you are doing today. Both for new members and those who have been with us a while.
- **Second chapters** - You finished a great career. Now tell us about your second (and third and fourth?) chapters of life.
- **Spousal support** - How your spouse helped in supporting your work during your AP career.
- **My most unusual story** - tell us about an unusual, off the wall story that you covered.
- **"A silly mistake that you make"** - a chance to 'fess up with a memorable mistake in your journalistic career.
- **Multigenerational AP families** - profiles of families whose service spanned two or more generations.
- **Volunteering** - benefit your colleagues by sharing volunteer stories - with ideas on such work they can do themselves.
- **First job** - How did you get your first job in journalism?





- **Most unusual** place a story assignment took you.

**Paul Stevens**

**Editor**, Connecting newsletter

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